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L E T T E R

To

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Esq.

1790.



A

LETTER

TO

W^M. WILBERFORCE, Esq.

BY

PHILO-AFRICANUS.

—

LONDON:

Printed for J. DEBRETT, opposite Burlington House, Piccadilly.

M.DCC.XC.

THE
ATLANTIC

OT

W. WILBERFORCE - Esq.



AMERICANUS.

LONDON:

Printed for the Author by J. D. & C. Rivington, Paternoster Row.

SIR,

I HAVE observed, with great concern, the growing inattention of the public towards the discussion of the slave trade, a subject in which, as you justly observe, "the interests, not only of this country, "nor of Europe alone, but of the whole "world, and of posterity, are involved." You only, Sir, have still the virtue to persevere in your exertions; to abstract your attention from the paltry revolutions of Europe, and to employ your precious time and abilities in favour of the unfortunate Africans, even while they ungratefully refuse to think themselves unfortunate, or to take any notice of your unsolicited exer-

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tions.

tions. You, therefore, Mr. Wilberforce, are the natural patron of all speculators on the subject; and it is in this quality that I presume to claim a part of your attention.

I am, Sir, a plain Englishman, and, like most of my countrymen, have some knowledge and some prejudices. I believe that the French ate frogs and wore wooden shoes, until their glorious revolution had left them nothing to eat, and no shoes to burn. I hate slavery; and having convinced myself, by the reasonings of our friend Mr. Clarkson, that Guinea captains are in the habit of poisoning their crews, and that West-India planters are very fond of maiming and starving the negroes, on whom they depend for subsistence, I became an early convert to the project of abolishing the African slave trade. I might add, that my zeal has not been useless, and that

that I have made some proselytes, even among those who, from their total ignorance with respect to Africa and the West Indies, were least interested in the success of our undertaking. But I will not take the glory to myself. Human reason had little share in disseminating our opinions, and the most profane and desperate unbelievers cannot attribute to such a source, the numerous petitions to parliament that have appeared in our behalf.

Unfortunately, Sir, the Legislature took time to reflect : I say unfortunately, because such a delay could only tend to disturb and confound the understandings of His Majesty's loving subjects. I, alas ! have had more than my share of the general perplexity. You will scarcely believe it, Sir, but my confusion of mind came upon me immediately after that glorious display of eloquence, which will immortalize

talize the name of Wilberforce. While you were speaking, Sir, I participated in all your feelings, entered into all your arguments, and adopted all your conclusions. When you said to the House of Commons, " wherever the sun shines, let us go round the world with him diffusing our benefice," I could bear it no longer, but left the House, in order to meditate in silence on what I had heard. A committee of little suns ! a legislative constellation ! all embarking on a voyage through the ecliptic !—It was a most transporting idea. The Empress's tour in the Crim was a joke to it. But when I reflected on the gouty members—on the married members —when I considered that the old sun, who might be supposed to know his business, had done so little for the emancipation of Africa—I began to doubt whether it would be practicable to abolish slavery by transporting the House of Commons.

Sir, since this first moment of confusion, I have never been able to reason straight forward, or to my own satisfaction. Even when I endeavoured to follow up your most victorious arguments—when I set off from the same premises—I found myself insensibly led to opposite conclusions. This, however, I conceived to be neither your fault nor mine, but the natural effect of solitary meditation. A man, I apprehend, ought never to discuss any point with himself: he has such a natural partiality for all the suggestions of his own understanding, he has such a deference for the objections that himself has raised, and makes allowances on all sides so much beyond what he is in honour bound to do, that if he is not of a strong constitution, he may probably die without forming any opinion at all. But when he is engaged with a good substantial antagonist, he has only one side of the argument to attend to,

and

and no ceremonies to obfervē; he may treat his adversary as you treat Mr. Norris; he may pervert his reafonings, and distort his facts; and however unequal he may prove in the conflict, he must be very unlucky, or very ignorant in the practice of dispute, if he does not remain at laſt in full poſſeſſion of his own opinion. For these weighty cauſes, having provided myſelf with as much logic as I could conveniently carry, I went in ſearch of an enemy againſt whom I might discharge it; and I ſoon found one at a neighbouring coffee house, in the perſon of a tall fun-burnt West Indian, whom, from the blackneſs of his eyes and the whiteness of his teeth, I ſtrongly ſuspect of being what they call an Anthropophagift.

After ſome conveſation, which was only intended to introduce my ſubject, I proceeded to make a panegyric on civiliza-
tion,

tion, the parent of humanity. I observed, as you have done, Sir, that European Princes never go to war but from the best motives, *a zeal for the maintenance of commerce, and a tender love for their subjects*: that these their royal views were fully apparent from their royal manifestoes, by which they in their mercy make known to the world, the times and seasons at which the desolation of Europe becomes necessary to its happiness: but that in Africa the victims of war had the additional misery of knowing, that their destruction was owing to resentment or jealousy, or some equally unnatural passion, the existence of which must necessarily be attributed to the accursed slave trade. I then repeated the third resolution proposed by you to the House of Commons, and waited with an air of triumph for the answer of my antagonist.

Sir,

Sir, the ugly man in the coffee house replied as follows :

“ Since you tell me that the slave trade
“ has *necessarily* a tendency to destroy the
“ political happiness of Africa by pro-
“ moting wars, and its domestic happiness
“ by perverting the course of justice, I
“ must suppose that you infer this ten-
“ dency from past experience, or that you
“ think it perfectly demonstrable by argu-
“ ment.

“ The appeal to experience may be soon
“ decided. Are wars more frequent in
“ Africa now than formerly ? You will
“ tell me, that this cannot be ascertained
“ for want of sufficient data to ground
“ the comparison. But, of the numerous
“ wars which have come to our know-
“ ledge, can you prove that any one has
“ been excited by the operation of the
“ slave

" slave trade ? Certainly not. Is not this
 " trade a voluntary trade on the part of
 " the Africans, and have they not the
 " power of putting an end to it whenever
 " they shall cease to think it advantageous ?
 " Most assuredly. How then do you
 " prove that a cause is necessarily produc-
 " tive of effects which it has never pro-
 " duced ? If the Africans feel the many
 " evils you have described, why do they
 " not end them ? If they do not feel
 " them, how do you prove that such evils
 " exist ?

" I do not assert that the Africans are
 " either very happy, or very wise ; I only
 " contend, that their miseries are not aug-
 " mented by our trade, and that, in their
 " intercourse with us, they reason justly.

" The practice of enslaving prisoners of
 " war appears to prevail very generally

C " through-

“ throughout Africa ; and such a custom,
“ though contrary to justice, is easily ex-
“ plained on motives of policy. What
“ conduct are we to expect from a barba-
“ rous conqueror to his prisoners ? By re-
“ storing them on the spot, he might lose
“ the fruits of his victory ; and, to keep
“ them till the return of peace, and after-
“ wards liberate them, may not be practi-
“ cable, as few uncivilized countries pro-
“ duce any considerable excess of provi-
“ sions. By enslaving his prisoners, he
“ obtains the double advantage of weaken-
“ ing the enemy, and of adding to his
“ own army as many soldiers as can be
“ replaced at home by the labour of the
“ captives. The adoption of this policy
“ among the neighbouring nations will
“ produce in each a stock of domestic
“ slaves : this stock will form a part of
“ their wealth ; men will become pro-
“ perty,

“ perty, and, like all other property, will
“ be transferrable.

“ In this state of things, suppose a fo-
“ reign market opened, what will be the
“ consequence? Slaves, you say, will con-
“ siderably increase in value—true; and
“ wars will therefore become less bloody
“ than before. But you contend, that
“ they will likewise become more fre-
“ quent, because they will become profit-
“ able: and here we differ,

“ If one nation in Africa possessed *ex-*
“ *clusively* any article of commerce, I can
“ conceive that the neighbouring nations
“ might endeavour to procure by violence
“ what they could not obtain in any other
“ way: but slaves in Africa are the *uni-*
“ *versal merchandise*. When a nation wants
“ European commodities, it seems more
“ natural to purchase these with its super-

" fluous stock, than to endanger this fu-
 " perfluity in a war with its neighbours.
 " Wars may be frequent in countries
 " where men are of little or no value ;
 " but I do not understand why an increase
 " of their value should make a nation more
 " eager to risk their destruction.

" Let us now consider the machinations
 " of our traders, whom we will suppose
 " totally void of humanity, and regardless
 " of every thing but their interest. We
 " know that the principal part of the
 " slaves is brought from the interior coun-
 " try, which is inaccessible to Europeans,
 " and where their intrigues can have no
 " influence. They might, perhaps, suc-
 " ceed in exciting a war on the coast ; but
 " by so doing they would completely de-
 "feat the purpose of their voyage, because
 " we know that, during every such war,
 " all trade is suspended : and for this rea-
 son

“ son all authors agree, that in every dis-
“ sention among the natives, the European
“ traders are employed as mediators, be-
“ cause they have the strongest interest in
“ the restoration of tranquillity.

“ The second charge against the slave
“ trade rests solely on allegations, unsup-
“ ported by proof. The Africans are un-
“ civilized, and their penal laws *may* be
“ absurd ; but we know that our own ex-
“ cellent code originated in a period of the
“ grossest barbarism. We may call witch-
“ craft an imaginary crime ; but would
“ not the African consider in the same
“ light the crimes of coining and forgery ?
“ We are told, on the authority of the
“ convicts themselves, that many of them
“ were unjustly condemned ; but do our
“ own convicts always acquiesce in the
“ justice of their condemnation ? Every
“ witness who has resided in Africa assures
“ us,

" us, that the laws are most strictly administered. The reward held out in England for the detection of crimes is not less likely to operate as a temptation to perjury than the value of a slave in Africa; and we have no means for its prevention, so formidable as their test or *Feteech*, which produces the instant destruction of the supposed offender.

" As a proof of the acts of violence which the slave trade has a necessary tendency to produce, Mr. Wilberforce has told us a story of a King of Barbessiu, who got drunk by Dr. Spaarman's bed-side, and then burnt a village of his own in order to procure a stock of slaves, whom he proposed to exchange with the Europeans for brandy. The fact may, perhaps, be true, for there is no crime of which a drunken despot may not be guilty; but upon what principle can

" his excesses be imputed to the European
 " slave trade? Let us suppose that this
 " trade had not existed, but that the Euro-
 " peans had wanted a cargo of gum, or
 " any other commodity, is it not evident,
 " that slaves being less valuable, he must
 " have burnt more villages, and have sold
 " to his neighbours a greater number of
 " his subjects, in order to procure such a
 " quantity of gum as might be sufficient
 " to exchange for the brandy he wanted?

" It is the system of slavery so univer-
 " sally prevalent in Africa, which is the
 " real evil. While that continues, while
 " slaves are a transferrable property, every
 " trade that we can devise with Africa
 " must operate as a slave trade, and it will
 " operate more fatally than the present,
 " because, in proportion as men become
 " less valuable, their lives will be less care-
 " fully preserved. The evil is inveterate,
 " and,

“ and, I am afraid, cannot easily be extir-
“ pated, because, in a country where men
“ are not incited to labour by wants, they
“ can only be compelled to it by violence;
“ It is impossible to foresee what will be
“ effected by the mission of Mr. Wadstrom
“ and the establishment of the new Jeru-
“ salem; but in the mean time, as it is
“ probable that the Africans do not con-
“ demn to slavery the most virtuous of
“ their countrymen, nor export the most
“ tractable of their slaves and captives, it
“ seems natural to infer, that little ad-
“ vantage can accrue from the abolition
“ of the present trade, and that the civili-
“ zation of Africa would not be much
“ promoted by the annual dispersion of
“ eighty thousand prisoners and con-
“ victs.”

In this place, Sir, my antagonist stopt
so abruptly, that I had no time to rally my
ideas

ideas, and marshal them in order of argument. I therefore contented myself with telling him, that I dissented from his opinions ; that the slave trade had been found by experience to carry misery and desolation wherever it had extended, and that these evils were interwoven with its first principles.

“ To this (replied he) I can only answer, that your first assertion is unsupported by proof, and the second an evident absurdity. The principle of the slave trade, and of every trade, is the desire of gain ; this frequently may, and probably does, produce, in both parties, a disposition to evade or infringe the laws of their respective communities. Were it otherwise, all commercial regulations would be absurd, because every such regulation is known to operate as a check on commercial inter-

" course. Abuses may have prevailed in
" the slave trade, and you have certainly a
" right to declare your own incapacity to
" suggest a remedy against them ; but to
" declare them without remedy, is to
" assert, that the Legislature of your coun-
" try is totally deficient, either in power,
" or in wisdom."

Sir, I hope you will admit, that this way of treating me was very provoking. I determined to be contemptuous in my turn, and, because I thought my answer would find the better for a classical allusion, I told him, that I had rather be mistaken with such a man as you, than be in the right with such a man as he, whom I could not but suspect of being steeled against the tender feelings of humanity by the habit of living among the victims of oppression : and lastly, that whatever might be the success of your efforts *here*, I trusted that

that the sacred flame of liberty would soon break out in Africa and in the West Indies. This, Sir, I thought would nettle him ; but, to my great surprise, he only smiled, and quietly resumed his discourse, as follows :

" Suppose you should address to the
 " English army a letter couched in these
 " terms — My friends, I have been study-
 " ing the principles of liberty, and find
 " that you are all slaves. You are subject
 " to laws which are not recognized by
 " your fellow citizens ; you are liable to
 " be beaten for getting drunk, which is a
 " pleasant action, and not naturally cri-
 " minal ; or for neglecting to hold up
 " your heads, or to walk in a particular
 " direction ; neither of which things are
 " naturally virtuous. If you think fit to
 " change your profession, you will be
 " whipped, or, perhaps, shot, although

" every man has a natural right to quit
 " one profession for another. I think
 " your pay very insufficient, and am con-
 " vinced that you must be extremely mis-
 " rable, because you will naturally make
 " the same reflections as I have done.
 " Perhaps some deceit has been employed
 " in order to trepan you into the service ;
 " but even if you have voluntarily enlisted,
 " the compact is void, because no man has
 " a right to part with his liberty.

" Such a letter, Sir, would probably be
 " considered as a proof of indiscretion ra-
 " ther than of humanity ; but in holding
 " the same language to the negroes your
 " motive is admitted as a sufficient justifi-
 " cation, because an insurrection in the
 " West Indies could lead to no worse con-
 " sequences than the massacre of a few
 " planters, with their wives and families.
 " But, Sir, your mode of judging these
 " planters

“ planters is not perfectly agreeable to the
“ common rules of justice. You may
“ have seen a soldier tied to the halberts,
“ and writhing under the lash; will you
“ therefore conclude, that the British offi-
“ cers are void of humanity? or would it
“ be any extenuation of such a calumny
“ to add, that they are not naturally hard-
“ hearted, but become so by the frequent
“ inspection of these sanguinary execu-
“ tions? No man forms his opinion of the
“ English nation from the contents of an
“ English sessions paper; and yet it was
“ on similar materials that it was proposed
“ to ground our condemnation, if a suffi-
“ cient quantity could have been collected
“ by the malignant industry of our re-
“ rend inquisitors.

“ With respect to Mr. Wilberforce, I
“ know nothing but what I have learnt
“ from his speech; you will therefore
“ permit

" permit me to make some remarks on
" that performance before I subscribe to
" the panegyric which you are pleased to
" bestow on his character,

" The slave trade had long been the
" subject of public discussion : a regulating
" act had passed, for the purpose of cor-
" recting such abuses as were thought to
" have prevailed in the mode of transport-
" ing negroes to the West Indies : it had
" been declared, that the situation of the
" negroes in the islands was greatly im-
" proved during the last thirty years ; and
" at this period Mr. Wilberforce came
" forward to prove, that the regulating act
" had regulated nothing, that a palliative
" was in the nature of things impossible,
" and that the humanity of the planters,
" which had been hitherto voluntary,
" ought to become in future the effect of
" compulsion."

" Concluding

“ Concluding that every member has
 “ read the voluminous report of the Privy
 “ Council, he furnishes them with a rule
 “ for judging of the veracity of its con-
 “ tents.”

“ I mean (says he) to lay it down as
 “ my principle, that evidences, and espe-
 “ cially *interested*, evidences, are not to be
 “ judges of the *argument*. In matters of
 “ fact, I admit their competency—but in
 “ reasoning about *causes and effects*, I hold
 “ them to be totally incompetent. I will
 “ not believe the mere opinions of African
 “ traders concerning the nature and con-
 “ sequences of the slave trade, &c.”

“ Now, Sir, I conceive that I gain very
 “ little information by learning a *fact*, un-
 “ less I know whether it is an usual event,
 “ or an exception to general custom : and
 “ for this I must trust to the *opinion* of the

" witness, formed by reasoning on causes and
 " effects. But as all the *disinterested* wit-
 " nesses on this question have contented
 " themselves with only *visiting* the coasts
 " of Africa, and those who have *resided* in
 " the country have done so from *interested*
 " motives, it follows that their credibility
 " will be in an *inverse ratio* to their know-
 " ledge and experience."

" In general, I believe, mankind are
 " much less scrupulous in admitting opi-
 " nions, which they can afterwards cor-
 " rect, than facts, in which the error can-
 " not be so easily detected. For instance ;
 " when Mr. Wilberforce declared that, *in*
 " *his opinion*, the culture of indigo would
 " greatly contribute to the wealth and po-
 " pulation of Africa, the House very qui-
 " etly acquiesced : but if he had *asserted*
 " *as fact* that the culture of this plant is
 " not particularly pernicious to health,
 " they

" they would have required some confirmation of his assurances, and would have found that his proposal was the most effectual expedient that could be devised for the speedy depopulation of the country.

" Men of plain understandings will compare evidences with each other, and with such notions as they know to be well founded. When a witness from Goree tells us that it is the practice of the Moors to cross the Niger, and to seize the women and children in the villages whilst the men are at work in the fields, we shall suspend our belief, because there is no such river as the Niger on the western coast of Africa, and because, in the country which he describes, the women, and not the men, are employed in agriculture. When Mr. Wadstrom tells us, that the French

“ Captains take out a quantity of mercury, which they mix with the food of the slaves, we may suspect that a nation so famous for gallantry might take out a stock of mercury for very different purposes. When a still more respectable person, when Mr. Wilberforce himself assures us, that ‘ it is the *constant* practice,’ in the African trade, ‘ to set sail in the night, lest the slaves should be sensible of their departure,’ we shall humbly represent to him that ships do not usually set sail without the previous ceremony of weighing anchor. That this ceremony, as well as that of *saluting*, must necessarily awaken the attention of the slaves to the moment of their departure—that, being confined in the hold, they would not observe much alteration in the prospect, though they should sail at mid-day—and lastly, that in tropical climates the wind blows off

“ shore

" shore only during a short time before
 " and after sun-rise, and that a *constant*
 " *practice* of sailing against the wind is
 " such a wicked instance of perversity as
 " cannot easily be credited, even on the
 " assertion of Mr. Wilberforce.

" But supposing his *principle* established,
 " what is his practice? He relates to the
 " House, from the testimony of Captain
 " Hall, what he calls the *tragedy* of Ca-
 " labar, containing a fact, viz. a war be-
 " tween two towns, and a matter of op-
 " nion, viz. that this war was excited by
 " the English traders. Here Mr. Wilber-
 " force, in direct opposition to his own
 " principle, blends the fact and opinion,
 " and states them as equally incontestible.
 " You will say, perhaps, that he had, in
 " this instance, particular reasons for be-
 " ing so prodigal of belief? Not at all.
 " Captain Hall relates a circumstance

" which he *beard* fifteen years ago, and
 " which *happened* five years before his ar-
 " rival in Africa : the conduct that he at-
 " tributes to the traders is not less absurd
 " than atrocious, because (as I have al-
 " ready observed) during a war on the
 " coast all trade is suspended : and the wit-
 " ness confesses that the English were re-
 " ceived, after their pretended treachery,
 " with as much cordiality as before.

" Mr. Wilberforce is very fond of nar-
 " rations. Having told us the history of
 " a King of Barbeffin, and the tragical
 " story of Calabar, he proceeds to tell
 " another story about a Captain Bibby and
 " a King at the river Cameroons. The
 " Captain, it seems, had advanced goods
 " to the computed value of eighty slaves,
 " on the credit of thirty hostages, who
 " were alledged to be relations of the
 " King, and other persons of distinction in

" the country ; and, when the natives re-
 " fused to redeem them, he carried them
 " off with him to Barbadoes. The people
 " of the country, in return, seized some
 " English Captains whom they found on
 " shore, and extorted from them the value
 " of the pawns carried off by Capt. Bibby ;
 " in consequence of which these Captains
 " transmitted a petition to Governor Parry,
 " requesting that Captain Bibby should be
 " compelled to restore his pledges, as it
 " was just that he alone should suffer by
 " his own misconduct. So far the story
 " suited Mr. Wilberforce's purpose ; but
 " he very wisely omitted to relate, that
 " the African Prince, having gained all
 " the advantages he had proposed to him-
 " self by his artifices, refused to receive
 " his pretended children and relations, and
 " desired that they might be carried back
 " and sold in the West Indies, which was
 " accordingly done.

" I do

" I do not mean to *censure* Mr. Wilberforce for omitting such circumstances as may not suit his argument, nor for employing samples of stories instead of the whole: he is deeply interested in the success of a question by which he has gained a kind of celebrity; and it is natural that he should employ every means of obtaining a favourable decision. I only wish that his *manner* may be understood, and that the professions of candour and impartiality by which he prefaced his speech may obtain as much credit as the professions of diffidence which made a part of the same preamble.

" Let us now consider the second part of the speech, which relates to the mode of transporting slaves to the West Indies.

" This

“ This part of the question seems sub-
“ ject to no difficulty, for if it be possible
“ for the British Legislature to insure the
“ safe conveyance of our own convicts to
“ Botany Bay, and to provide against the
“ diseases naturally resulting from so
“ many changes of climate, it is evidently
“ as easy to secure the health of the ne-
“ groes during a short passage of six weeks.
“ The charges exhibited against the for-
“ mer mode of conveying slaves may
“ prove that regulations are necessary, but
“ cannot prove that they are impracticable.
“ Mr. Wilberforce therefore would have
“ acted more wisely in suppressing those
“ wild and extravagant descriptions which
“ could not have obtained a moment’s
“ credit, even if they had not been posi-
“ tively contradicted by the whole body of
“ evidence. But it is needless to detect
“ the falsehood of his descriptions, since
“ he

“ he has here thought fit to stake his credit on the exactness of his calculations.

“ He says, ‘ it will be found on an average of all the ships, of which evidence has been given at the Privy Council, that, exclusive of those who perish before they sail, not less than 12½ per cent. perish in the passage.’ To these he adds 4½ per cent. who die on shore in the West Indies before the day of sale: and he quotes Mr. Long’s history to prove that one third of the remainder, or 33½ per cent., die in the seasoning. ‘ Upon the whole (says he) here is a mortality of about 50 per cent.’

“ This would be, indeed, a most formidable mortality ! But in the first place,

“ The

“ The average number of slaves who
 “ perish in the passage, as appears by the
 “ report of the Privy Council, is not $12\frac{1}{2}$
 “ per cent., but rather less than *ten*.

“ Secondly, This comprehends the
 “ whole difference between the number
 “ shipped and the number sold: conse-
 “ quently we must *not* add to these the $4\frac{1}{2}$
 “ per cent. supposed to perish between
 “ their arrival in the islands and the time of
 “ sale.

“ Thirdly, Mr. Long *does not say* that
 “ one third of the negroes imported die in
 “ the seasoning, but that one third of those
 “ who arrive *in a diseased state* may pro-
 “ bably die during the three first years.
 “ Mr. Wilberforce has told us, that none
 “ but healthy negroes are purchased in
 “ Africa; but we will suppose, if you
 “ please, that one fifth of these contract

" mortal disorders during their passage,
 " 4½ per cent. die before the sale, there
 " remains therefore 15½ per cent., of
 " which about a third, or 5 per cent.,
 " may be supposed to die in the seasoning.
 " The total loss, therefore, amounts, on
 " these suppositions, to 15 per cent., and
 " not to 50, as stated by Mr. Wilber-
 " force.

" Such an instance of exaggeration re-
 quires no comments: we will therefore
 " now proceed to the third division of his
 " speech, in which he treats of the effects
 " that would follow in the West Indies
 " from the abolition of the slave trade.

" Mr. Wilberforce tells us, that having
 " advanced thus far, ' he was DETER-
 " MINED never to rest till he had accom-
 " plished the abolition of the slave trade.'
 " But he adds, ' that his mind was ex-
 " tremely

" tremely harrassed by the reproaches of
 " the merchants and others interested in
 " the trade, and that if the ruin of the
 " West Indies threatened us on one hand,
 " while this load of iniquity pressed upon
 " us on the other, the alternative, indeed,
 " was awful. I am happy, Sir, to praise
 " Mr. Wilberforce where I can, and I sin-
 " cerely applaud him for having felt a
 " momentary regret while he devoted the
 " West Indies to ruin, and their negroes to
 " destruction.

" In the midst of this embarrassment he
 " fortunately reflected ' how strange it was
 " that Providence should have so consti-
 " tuted the world as to make one part of it
 " depend for its existence on the depopu-
 " lation of the other.' Such a reflection,
 " indeed, would have done little honour to
 " a man of less approved piety, because it
 " is evident that Providence was in no

“ way necessary to the evil in question,
 “ except in permitting the Spaniards to
 “ destroy the native inhabitants of the
 “ islands, and thus to induce the necessity
 “ of repeopling them from Africa : but,
 “ such as it was, it answered Mr. Wilber-
 “ force’s purpose. From this time ‘ *the*
 “ *light broke in upon him,*’ and he has
 “ kindly communicated to the world a
 “ view of the question in this state of illu-
 “ mination.

“ The decrease of the negroes in the
 “ islands arises from four causes :

- “ 1st. The disproportion of sexes.
- “ 2d. The disorders contracted in the
 “ middle passage.
- “ 3d. Excessive labour joined with im-
 “ proper food : and,
- “ 4th. The dreadful dissoluteness of
 “ their manners.

“ All

" All these causes may be remedied ;
 " and if we abolish the slave trade, they
 " must be remedied : and then births will
 " be increased : or else the deficiency may
 " be made up by the supernumerary house
 " negroes . or else we will introduce the
 " PLOUGH and other machinery : or else, if
 " the population should decrease, and the
 " produce with it, the prices of produce
 " will increase.

" Now this is an irrefragable argu-
 " ment. Ergo, &c.

" Such is the general sketch of the
 " question: we will now examine it in
 " detail.

" The obstacle to population, arising
 " from the disparity of sexes, must, as
 " Mr. Wilberforce observes, eventually
 " cure itself. But the remedy is distant,
 " and

“ and the evil is pressing. The supernumerary males, amounting in the island of Jamaica to 30,000, not only do not contribute to population, but they are a fatal check to it, by greatly increasing the profligacy among the females.

“ On the subject of the second obstacle there can be no doubt. If we put an end to the slave trade, no negroes can contract disorders in the middle passage.

“ The third obstacle is excessive labour, joined with improper food. The labour of a negro in the island by no means equals that of a day-labourer in Europe, not because the negro is weaker, but because it is impossible to exact from a slave the same exertions that will be voluntarily made by a free-man: but if we add the immoderate labours of the night to the work of the day, the sum becomes

“ becomes excessive, and is destructive of
“ the constitution. A negro will fre-
“ quently walk ten, or even fifteen, miles
“ in an evening to visit a favourite wife,
“ and return before sun-rise to his hut, in
“ spite of the utmost vigilance that can be
“ exerted to prevent him ; and as he is, on
“ these occasions, particularly anxious to
“ avoid suspicion, he will resume his la-
“ bours after this fatiguing journey with
“ increased alacrity. This is certainly a
“ very frequent cause of mortality among
“ the negroes ; but it should seem that this
“ practice cannot be attributed to the seve-
“ rity of their field labour, or to scanty or
“ improper food. Excessive labour can
“ never, I apprehend, be *exacted* from ne-
“ groes, because they are the most impa-
“ tient of mankind under what they con-
“ sider as injustice, and will instantly free
“ themselves from it by suicide, when un-
“ able to take vengeance on the aggressor.

“ There

" There may, indeed, be some cases where
 " they will make great, and, perhaps,
 " much too great exertions in favour of a
 " master, whom they know to be in dis-
 tress : but I suppose that such cases have
 " not hitherto been sufficiently frequent
 " to be considered as a general cause of the
 " decrease experienced in the population of
 " the islands.

" With respect to their food, I believe,
 " that where this is either insufficient or
 " improper, it will be found to arise either
 " from hurraicanes, or from long-continued
 " drought, or from such extremities of pe-
 cuniary distress in the master as will not
 " frequently occur. Mr. Wilberforce
 " cannot seriously believe his own affer-
 " tion, that there is a constant tendency
 " to the *minimum* with respect to slaves'
 " allowance ; nor can he be ignorant that,
 " except in times of great calamity, our
 " markets

" markets are universally supplied with
 " fruit, vegetables, poultry, and various
 " other articles by the slaves, who there-
 " fore must possess something beyond what
 " is necessary for their own subsistence.
 " But, even if it were otherwise, *popula-*
 " *tion* could not easily be affected by it,
 " because the unproductive negroes, who
 " compose above two thirds of every gang,
 " would be the first victims of their mas-
 " ter's brutality, while his own interest
 " would plead for those who were able to
 " increase his profits, and to recruit the
 " stock by fresh population.

" The fourth cause of mortality among
 " the negroes is the dissoluteness of their
 " manners. This may be, in a great mea-
 " sure, ascribed to polygamy, which pro-
 " bably must operate as a check to popu-
 " lation, even in Africa, but which is a
 " most preposterous custom in the West

“ Indies, where it increases to an enormous degree the disproportion between the sexes, and has a most fatal influence on the health of the husbands. Besides, the negroes, though extremely jealous of their wives, are perfectly indifferent to the conduct of their daughters. These, therefore, become prostitutes almost from their childhood, and seldom think of attaching themselves to one man till they are worn out by excesses with many. The children generally perish during infancy from the effects of a disorder transmitted to them by the mothers, who studiously conceal these effects of their licentiousness until the disease becomes incurable; and hence it happens that, on many estates, no negroes can be raised, excepting such as are the produce of African mothers.

“ These

“ These evils, and many others arising
“ from the same source, have been long
“ felt and deplored by the planters, and
“ every expedient that their ingenuity,
“ quickened by interest and enlightened
“ by experience, could devise, has been
“ employed to check the disorder. It is
“ easy to say that regular marriages have
“ not been *properly* encouraged ; and if by
“ *properly* we mean *successfully*, the asser-
“ tion is true. But Mr. Wilberforce does
“ not make any allowance for that frenzy
“ of desire that boils in the veins of an
“ African, and renders him insensible to
“ every other allurement, and superior to
“ the dread of severity. Those who rea-
“ son about slavery on abstract principles
“ see nothing but unlimited power on one
“ side, and unlimited submission on the
“ other, and form to themselves the idea
“ of a situation which does not and can-
“ not exist in nature. One of the ablest

“ monarchs of the present century, at the
“ head of the most docile and submissive
“ nation in the universe, exhausted all the
“ resources of despotism in an attempt to
“ induce or compel his subjects to part
“ with their beards; but the Russians
“ continued, and still continue, inflexibly
“ attached to this ornament, though pro-
“ scribed by their favourite Emperor, and
“ considered as the characteristic symbol
“ of slavery. Can it be supposed that a
“ plurality of wives affords fewer sources
“ of enjoyment than a long beard, or that
“ the power of our colonial assemblies is
“ equal to that of Peter the Great? To
“ legislate for slaves is not easy, because,
“ having fewer *rights*, they are more per-
“ tinaciously attached to their customs,
“ even where these are the result of ca-
“ price, and not founded on the strongest
“ propensities of human nature: besides,
“ having no confidence in their governors,

“ they

“ they are jealous of every innovation,
“ and frequently pass at once from the
“ extreme of submission to the most despe-
“ rate resistance.

“ On this view of the question it will
“ appear that you ought to point out the
“ means of removing the obstacles above
“ mentioned, before you say that they
“ may and must be removed; but as I
“ have given a statement of them rather
“ different from that exhibited by Mr.
“ Wilberforce, you may suppose that I
“ wish to evade his argument. I will
“ therefore meet him on his own grounds,
“ and prove to you, from his own reason-
“ ings and assertions, that the abolition of
“ the slave trade would and *must* have an
“ effect directly contrary to that which
“ he seems to expect from it. He sup-
“ poses that the decrease of the negroes
“ arises from the rigorous treatment of the
“ planters,

" planters, or rather of the managers : we
" will, if you please, take this for granted.

" Now, says he, the abolition of the
" trade will produce an inability of mak-
" ing any addition to the stock by pur-
" chase, or by any other means, except
" the encouragement of population.
" Granted. Henceforward, therefore, a
" milder treatment *must* be adopted. Not
" at all. Provided this inability exists, it
" is evidently indifferent whether it be
" produced by an act of the Legislature, or
" by any other cause. Now there are
" already many planters who are unable
" to purchase slaves ; and, if you will ex-
" amine all the islands, you will uni-
" formly find that it is on the estates of
" the poorest and most distressed planters
" that the decrease is greatest. The rigo-
" rous treatment of slaves always arises
" from the distress of the master, and Mr.

“ Wilberforce has given us an excellent
“ reason why it must be so. ‘ Interest
“ (says he) is undoubtedly the great spring
“ of action in the affairs of mankind ; but
“ it is *immediate* and *present*, not *distant*
“ *future* interest, however real, that is apt
“ to actuate us.’ The distressed planter
“ knows, that by rigorous treatment his
“ slaves will decrease, and that his ruin
“ will probably be the ultimate conse-
“ quence ; but he perseveres, because he
“ prefers future to present distress. Is it
“ not evident that the greater part of man-
“ kind would reason in the same way, if
“ they were placed in the same situation ?
“ Some few planters who unite opulence
“ and economy would probably diminish
“ their culture with a view to future ad-
“ vantage ; but in all classes of men the
“ majority are prodigal and inconsiderate.

“ After

“ After having endeavoured to convince
“ us by *argument* that the abolition of the
“ slave trade will be rather advantageous
“ than prejudicial to the islands, Mr. Wil-
“ berforce produces a long calculation to
“ prove the flourishing state to which they
“ have arrived *during the continuance of*
“ *that trade*, and insists, that the births
“ and deaths are now equal, and that
“ therefore any farther importation is un-
“ necessary. Now on this point I shall
“ beg leave to make three observations :
“ First ; if we admit both his facts and
“ his inferences, it will infallibly follow
“ that the abolition is unnecessary, and
“ that the evil must cure itself ; since it is
“ evident that the islands will cease to
“ buy negroes whenever they shall cease
“ to want them. Secondly ; his infer-
“ ences do not follow from his facts ; for,
“ let us suppose that an island has annu-
“ ally imported a thousand slaves, and that
“ this

" this importation shall cease in the present year, but that a thousand children shall be born : it is evident, that though the number of souls will be the same, the power will be very different, and that the island will be weaker by a thousand labourers this year than it was the last. Thirdly ; the facts on which his calculaton is grounded are false.

" Mr. Wilberforce states, in the tenth resolution, that

" In the year 1768 the number of negroes living in the island of Jamaica was about 167,000

" In the year 1774 about — 193,000

" And in the year 1787 about 256,000

" Now Mr. Wilberforce *knew* (because it was stated in the paper from which

H

" he

" he copied these numbers) that they were
 " all incorrect. The last is a mere *guess*,
 " and declared to be such: the two former
 " are too small, because they are taken
 " from the tax-rolls, in which *all* the ne-
 " groes are not rated. These tax-rolls,
 " however, though they do not give ex-
 " actly the positive number of negroes at
 " any one period, are the only authentic
 " record by which we can judge of the
 " relative numbers at different periods:
 " but Mr. Wilberforce contented himself
 " with following them where they suited
 " his purpose, and rejected them in the
 " last instance, because they did not fur-
 " nish a number large enough for his
 " hypothesis. By their statement the
 " number of negroes in 1787 was only
 " 210,894.

" If Mr. Wilberforce chuses to take the
 " two first numbers from the tax-rolls, it

" is evident that we must take the third
 " from the same authority ; or if he
 " chuses to add 45,000 to the last num-
 " ber, we must make a proportional addi-
 " tion to the other two ; and, in both
 " cases, it is evident that his assertions are
 " false, and that the islands cannot keep
 " up their stock of negroes without the
 " continuance of the trade.

" Mr. Wilberforce, indeed, is prepared
 " for this conclusion, and therefore kindly
 " offers us the use of the plough, as an
 " indemnification for all our losses. But,
 " Sir, I must suppose that this is a *bad*
 " *joke* ; for to consider it as the suggestion
 " of solemn quackery would be too de-
 " grading to our little Triptolemus. It
 " must have occurred to him, that of the
 " thousands who have successively mi-
 " grated from Europe to the West Indies
 " since the discovery of the islands, no one

" individual can possibly have been ignorant of the uses of the plough : he must have heard that it has been employed universally, and almost as universally abandoned ; and it required no great stretch of imagination to conceive that an instrument, so necessary to agriculture in one climate and country, might, from local circumstances, be inapplicable to the same uses in another. Besides, if ploughs are generally introduced, by what artifice could we induce them to cut our canes, to pass them through the mill, to boil our sugar, or distil our rum ? From what does he infer that horses or cattle might be usefully employed for these purposes ? He certainly knows that the mere operation of *planting* forms only a part of the labour, and that on those estates, where this operation takes place only once in twenty years,

" years, the same stock of negroes is ne-
" cessary.

" As a farther succedaneum, Mr. Wil-
" berforce advises the employment of our
" domestic slaves in field labour. These,
" I believe, do not amount to one fourth
" of the number that he supposes: many
" of our servants are free men; others
" have been taken into the house from
" their inability to support the labour of
" the field; and others as a reward for
" their docility and fidelity. This re-
" source, therefore, would prove extremely
" inadequate, and the advantages of the
" experiment would by no means com-
" pensate its cruelty.

" But (says Mr. Wilberforce) ' if it be
" insisted that the deficiency can in no
" way be supplied, and that the quantity
" of produce must diminish, I then revert
" to

" to that *irrefragable* argument, that the
" increase of price will make up the loss
" to the planters, and is a clear ultimate
" security.'

" This irrefragable argument, however,
" is by no means universally admitted,
" even in questions of taxation, to which
" it is peculiarly applicable; but, in the
" present instance, it is no argument at
" all. The abolition would not, in the first
" instance, produce any diminution of
" produce, because the poorer planters be-
" ing generally under contract to furnish a
" determinate annual quantity, would con-
" tinue to do so until the increasing weak-
" ness of their negroes should render a far-
" ther compliance with their agreement
" absolutely impossible. From this pe-
" riod, indeed, the diminution would be
" rapid, and it is probable that the price
" would for a time increase in the same
" propor-

“ proportion ; but this would be no in-
“ demnification to the sufferers, it would
“ only be a profit accruing to the opulent
“ planters from the distresses of the neces-
“ sitous. This state of things, however,
“ could not be lasting. Either the con-
“ sumption would diminish, or the con-
“ sumer would insist on being freed from
“ the monopoly of the British planters,
“ and would receive the articles of West-
“ Indian produce at a cheaper rate from
“ the foreign colonies.

“ I have now discussed the most impor-
“ tant parts of Mr. Wilberforce’s speech,
“ so that the remainder may be dispatched
“ in a few words. I should, indeed, have
“ passed it over in silence, but that it may
“ not be amiss to show how uniformly he
“ misrepresents *every* part of the subject.
“ He says, ‘ it is absurd to pretend that
“ Liverpool will be sensibly affected by the
“ abolition,

" abolition, because the slave trade occupies only one fifteenth part of the outward-bound tonnage at that port.' Now the total outward-bound tonnage of Liverpool amounts to 56,000 tons, of which 14,000 are occupied by the African trade. This, I conceive, is *one fourth*, and not *one fifteenth*, part of the whole.

" He tells us, that all the ships discharged in consequence of the abolition might be usefully employed in our fisheries, or other trades. But I believe it would be found inconvenient to employ large ships instead of boats in our fisheries. Besides, our negroes in the islands principally subsist on salted fish : and there seems no reason for supposing that the demand for this article will be increased by the defalcation of 17,000 consumers, who are annually imported into the several islands.

" He

" He gravely defends the accuracy of
 " Mr. Clarkson's calculations, and assures
 " us, that *more sailors die in one year in the*
 " *slave trade than in two years in all our*
 " *trades put together*; and that the five
 " thousand sailors employed in this trade
 " are *not a benefit to our navy, as some have*
 " *ignorantly argued.*

" He then proceeds to ridicule the *weak*
 " and *absurd* opinion of certain persons,
 " who thought that France would con-
 " tinue to carry on their trade, whenever
 " it should be relinquished by the English.
 " It is true that some missionaries, from
 " those benevolent and conscientious soci-
 " eties whom he so highly praises, had
 " exerted themselves with great effect in
 " France, and had nearly succeeded in
 " severing for ever the colonies from the
 " mother country: but the final decision
 " of the National Assembly has confirmed

" the weak and absurd opinion so ably refuted by Mr. Wilberforce.

" Lastly, he foresees, from the abolition
 " of the present trade, the establishment
 " of an extensive, advantageous, and
 " harmless commerce with the Africans.
 " This, indeed, were devoutly to be
 " wished ! but on what grounds we can
 " hope for such an event, I cannot understand.
 " All the dying wood that Britain
 " is able to consume, and all the gold dust
 " that can be procured, would not employ
 " more than one twentieth part of the
 " shipping now sent to Africa. The culture
 " of indigo and tobacco requires more
 " intelligence than can be at present expected
 " from negroes. Rice, indeed,
 " might be produced to almost any
 " amount ; but it could nowhere find a
 " market so advantageous as that which is
 " offered by the slave merchants, who

" would gladly purchase seven or eight
 " times the quantity that has ever been
 " raised on the coast. Besides, though we
 " have certainly a right to determine what
 " articles we will *import* from Africa, our
 " exports must be left to the choice of the
 " Africans : by what art then can mora-
 " lity and virtue be infused into the
 " brandy, or mixed up with the gun-
 " powder, which they are always so eager
 " to purchase ? And if we cannot do this,
 " how can our trade be harmless and inof-
 " fensive ? Be assured, that if civilization
 " ever take place in Africa, it will be there,
 " as it has been every where else, the ef-
 " fect of internal regulation ; and that it
 " will be very little advanced by the
 " dreams of Messrs. Wilberforce, Wad-
 " strom, and Co. The abolition of slavery
 " is not any where the work of a day : the
 " enfranchisement of Russia has been the
 " favourite object of the present Empress,

“ and it is the only project, the success of
“ which is still wanting to complete her
“ glory.

“ I shall now conclude, by intreating
“ you to pardon any expressions that you
“ may have thought disrespectful to the
“ character of your favourite orator. I am
“ not the enemy of Mr. Wilberforce, nor
“ do I ascribe to him, or to the harmless
“ fanatics by whom he is surrounded, the
“ original project for abolishing the slave
“ trade. The paroxysm of humanity first
“ appeared among the Americans. Their
“ sagacity first pointed out the wicked ten-
“ dency of a trade, with which it was
“ their interest to disgust the Europeans,
“ in order to secure to themselves a natural
“ and permanent connection with the
“ West Indies : and it did not escape them
“ that the discussion of such a measure
“ was very likely to produce a considerable
“ degree

“ degree of jealousy between the mother
“ country and the colonies. Many of their
“ proselytes, I am persuaded, have been
“ actuated by the purest and most consci-
“ entious motives, but their zeal has long
“ since abated. The language of exagge-
“ ration, having ceased to inflame, begins
“ to be heard with disgust, and crimes are
“ no longer considered as credible in pro-
“ portion as they are atrocious. We
“ are now told, that after having been so
“ long held out to public execration for
“ doing what the laws of our country per-
“ mitted and encouraged us to do, we may
“ hope to see our cause speedily consigned
“ to oblivion, although it is impracticable
“ to afford us the means of exculpating
“ ourselves, or to limit the duration of a
“ trial, which operates as a punishment,
“ by annihilating our credit, and endan-
“ gering our properties and our persons.”

After

After these words, Sir, my antagonist suddenly disappeared, notwithstanding my endeavours to stop him. Do not suppose that I was convinced : no, Sir ; that is a weakness with which I have never had reason to reproach myself. Old opinions are like old friends : and a man of humanity, far from abandoning them in distress, will consider their helpless situation as an additional claim to his protection.

Now as you, Sir, are equally interested in their welfare, and as I am persuaded that you can fish up from the depths of your understanding a variety of arguments which I should search for in vain, I humbly beg leave to request a communication of such as you shall think me able to manage ; in the hope of which I remain,

S I R,

Your most respectful humble servant,

PHILO-AFRICANUS.

THE END.



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